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THE PAST AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE IN MARGARET LAURENCE

by

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Abstract

Criticism of Margaret Laurence's fiction has pointed to her concern with the past as a restrictive power and as a source of alienation and isolation from whose stranglehold her characters struggle to free themselves. However, the argument of this thesis is that Laurence also sees the past as a means to self-knowledge and inner freedom. While she is critical of the ancestors, she also acknowledges that their values, traditions, and perceptions are largely the basis of individual identity. Indeed, the richness of Laurence's characterizations is strongly linked to her efforts to imply, if not always state, the past forces which have shaped her characters. The ancestors can never be denied altogether, and it is therefore necessary that the individual find some means of living, with humanity and dignity, within the context of the past. Such means must encompass understanding and asserting oneself against the limitations imposed by background while at the same time accepting that one can not escape the past completely. For Laurence, inner freedom and self-knowledge imply not escape from but understanding and acceptance of the past.

This thesis traces Laurence's conception of the interaction between past and present through an analysis of The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories, This Side Jordan, The Stone Angel, A Jest of God,

The Fire-Dwellers, A Bird in the Houses, and The Diviners. In both the African works and the earlier novels of the Manawaka cycle, I consider Laurence's perception of the past as a source of misunderstanding, fear, and isolation, but I also contend that Laurence views the past itself, if properly confronted, as a means to self-understanding. In A Bird in the House and The Diviners, I explore the relationship between past and present primarily in terms of artistic perception and the writer's incorporation of past experience within her art. For Vanessa MacLeod and Morag Gunn, the past becomes a source of artistic expression; the artistic expression in turn becomes a means of coming to terms with the past. Much the same may be said of Laurence's own work. The Manawaka cycle in particular allows Laurence to explore her cultural background as a means to self-understanding. These works also offer the Canadian reader insight into the nature of the Canadian experience and thereby provide him a means of understanding himself as a Canadian.

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Introduction

Margaret Laurence's world began in Neepawa, Manitoba, and she acknowledges that she "learned the sight of [her] particular eyes" in this small prairie town.[1] The sight of those particular eyes is, of course, Laurence's perception of the world, of reality both past and present, and perforce the perceptual basis for the imaginative vision by which Laurence transmutes experience into art. As Laurence states in her essay "Where the World Began,"

> When I was eighteen, I couldn't wait to get out of that town, away from the prairies. I did not know then that I would carry the land and the town all my life within my skull, that they would form the mainspring and source of the writing I was to do, wherever and however far away I might live. (HS 24-25)

While Laurence's small-town prairie background is the obvious mainspring of her writing in the Manawaka series, the themes which she explores in the earlier literature drawn from her experiences in Africa, namely The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories and the novel This Side Jordan, also reveal the influence of personal background on Laurence's art. Thus, while Laurence states in her foreword to Heart of a Stranger that "[l]iving away from home gives a new perspective on home" (HS vii), in fact the perspectives she brought from home shaped her perception of other lands. Indeed, a major theme within both Laurence's African and Canadian works centres

on the influence which background has in shaping one's understanding of self and of the world.

In her consideration of this theme, Laurence examines the darker influences of the past as a force of restriction and limitation and as a source of alienation, dissociation, and loneliness. In several stories in The Tomorrow-Tamer collection and in This Side Jordan, in particular, Laurence describes the limitations which background places on human understanding in terms of the conflict between European and African cultures. In these works, differences in world view, differences shaped by and within past time, lead to misunderstanding, fear, hatred, even murder. The conflict may stem from one character's conscious effort to impose his ideology on others, or from a character's tragic inability to adapt to changing conditions which he initially attempts to embrace. Essentially, the past itself is a central character in these works, the conflicts serving to underscore the power of the ancestors to control and limit perception. The image of the ancestors suggests not only the theme of alienation between cultures, however, for even within one's own culture, the limitations imposed by background can lead to isolation, self-repression, and failed communication. These negative aspects of "tribalism" are given a Canadian context in The Stone Angel, A Jest of God, and The Fire-Dwellers.

In light of Laurence's concern with the limitations of background, I concur with critics such as Professor Harrison and Joan Hind-Smith who argue that Laurence explores the past in terms of its power to

isolate and enslave. Yet for Laurence background is not solely a source of alienation and imprisonment nor, as Joan Hind-Smith contends, does the stranglehold of the ancestors prevent "the individual from finding his own identity."[2] I do not concur, furthermore, with Professor Harrison's assertion that

> [w]hat Laurence finds most consistently in her search through the past is confirmation of a need to be freed from the past and the burden of guilt it has left.[3]

Rather, through her art Laurence affirms that one's identity is one's past and that one can therefore never escape the influence of the ancestors altogether. This conception of the present as a function of past reality is contained in Laurence's assertion that "the past and the future are both always present, present in both senses of the word, always now and always here with us."[4] Or, as Stacey MacAindra notes, "The past doesn't seem ever to be over."[5] The "presence" of the past is the main premise of Laurence's treatment of character in her fiction. As Laurence has told Donald Cameron, her central aim in writing is to "present the living individual on the printed page, in all his paradox and all his craziness."[6] The effort involves an attempt to "get down . . . everything that has gone to influence" a character's life--the historical, family, social, and religious influences and the personal relationships which have all shaped an individual's essential self.[7] Laurence states further in "Time and the Narrative Voice":

> In any work of fiction, the span of time present in the story is not only as long as the time-span of every character's life and memory; it also represents everything acquired and passed on in a kind of memory-heritage from one generation to

> another. The time which is present in any story, therefore, must--by implication at least--include not only the totality of the characters' lives but also the inherited time of perhaps two or even three past generations, in terms of parents' and grandparents' recollections, and the much much longer past . . . of a collective cultural memory. Obviously, not all of this can be conveyed in a single piece of prose. Some of it can only be hinted at; some of it may not be touched on at all. Nevertheless, it is <u>there</u> because it exists in the minds of the characters.[8]

That the past beyond even direct personal experience is contained in the minds of the characters conveys Laurence's perception of the past as a shaping force. The past is thus a source of self, and any attempt to erase the past constitutes a denial of one's identity. Moreover, within her fiction Laurence affirms the past itself as a source of self-knowledge; inner freedom is thus attained not through a rejection of the past but through coming to terms with it--through understanding both its limitations and its value, through accepting that there is a certain amount of "mental baggage" which one can not discard,[9] through finding some means of living with one's "accumulation of happenings," and therefore with oneself.[10] Those characters in Laurence's fiction who do learn to live with the past learn how to live with themselves. Perhaps even more significant to Laurence's understanding of her art is her consideration in <u>A Bird in the House</u> and <u>The Diviners</u> of an artistic role which necessitates the incorporation of personal experience within an artistic framework. In terms of Laurence herself, this role represents her own need to acknowledge her background and her past as a source for her art. The Manawaka works are thus Laurence's attempt to come to terms with her Canadian heritage and give voice to the Canadian experience.

Given Laurence's concern with background as a shaping force and her belief that the "living individual" must be presented in terms that suggest all of the influences which have shaped him, I intend to explore Laurence's conception of the relationship between past and present time through an analysis of the African short stories and novel and the novels and short stories of the Manawaka cycle. I shall examine Laurence's concern with the negative influences of the past in terms of the restrictions and limitations which background places on self-perception, understanding of others, compassion, and communication. These limitations extend not only to a character's inability to understand others or to make himself known to them, but also to his failure to comprehend the very limitations of his perception. However, I also intend to show that through her art Laurence affirms that freedom from the limitations imposed by the past is to be found not through a denial or rejection of past experience but through confronting, understanding, and acknowledging all of the influences which have shaped one's essential self. For Laurence, inner freedom implies not escape from but understanding of the past; change and growth are thus possible only within the context of what has been.

Chapter One

Margaret Laurence's perception of the interaction between past and present was shaped by her family's strong sense of the continuity between generations and by their concern to maintain the values and traditions which connected them to their Scottish ancestors. Indeed, Laurence's family so emphasized their Scottish heritage that for many years she considered Scotland to be her ancestral home. Her belief in the continuing presence of the ancestors is further grounded in her early years in Neepawa, for Laurence has acknowledged that she acquired her sense of tribal society growing up in a small, closely knit community.[1] The concept of tribalism itself implies the connection between past and present, conveying as it does the influence of older over younger generations, so that Laurence's interest in the influence of background is again shown to be rooted in her own personal past.

That Laurence felt the presence of the ancestors to be at time "stultifying" is evident in her confession to Clara Thomas, reiterated in "Where the World Began," that she could not wait to escape her small prairie town.[2] While she did escape in body, eventually to Africa, she could not escape in mind, for she carried with her perception integral to her understanding of the world: her interest in background as a shaping force and her sense of tribalism. These perceptions in turn provided the basis for Laurence's understanding of the African

experience and her artistic rendering of that understanding in The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories and This Side Jordan. Moreover, notwithstanding her desire to be free from her own past, Laurence's treatment of time in these works reveals her inherent belief that the past is inescapable. While she views the past as a source of limitation--of misconception, alienation, fear, and hatred--she also sees it, if properly confronted, as a source of understanding and freedom.

As a means of examining Laurence's conception of the shaping power of the past, I wish to turn first to a consideration of the dark side of her vision which emerges in The Tomorrow-Tamer collection. In several stories, Laurence's criticism of the past centres on the limitations imposed by the ancestors on understanding those who do not share one's traditions and values. In "The Tomorrow-Tamer" and "The Voices of Adamo," for example, Laurence develops the theme of alienation between cultures through an examination of the hold of past over present generations.

In both stories, Laurence uses images of regeneration to symbolize the continuity between past and present. In "The Tomorrow-Tamer," the idea of regeneration is contained in the image of the "thicket of ghosts, where the graves were, where every leaf and flower had fed on someone's kin, and the wind was the thin whisper speech of ancestral spirits."[3] This symbolism images a community established in and continuing through time, a concept also conveyed by the tree symbolism in "The Voices of Adamo":[4]

> A man is a leaf. . . . The leaf grows for

> a while, then falls, but the tree lives forever. One leaf is nothing. The tree is all. (TT 206)

In both stories, the past is thus a regenerative force, a continuing presence which offers the security of an established way of life.

The idea of security is also implicit in the fact that the past acts as the spiritual guardian of the present. In Owurasu, as in Adamo's village, the ancestors serve not only as common grandsires but as guardian spirits who can be invoked to protect the village against evil or harm. Such protection is not without its price, for it demands that the individual honour and appease the ancestral spirits in order to keep the community safe. Essentially, respect for the ancestors implies respect for the community as a whole, ensuring as it does the continuance and prosperity of village life. Both Kofi, the protagonist in "The Tomorrow-Tamer," and Adamo, the protagonist in "The Voices of Adamo," understand themselves in terms of their prescribed responsibility to the community.

The "dead and guardian" grandsires in these stories therefore act as the metaphoric link between past and present, shaping perception by assuring the continuity of established patterns of thought. While the security of a self-contained way of life is admittedly a positive force, the negative aspects of tribalism emerge when the community undergoes change and the individual is confronted by an alien world view with which he is ill-prepared to cope. Both Kofi's and Adamo's worlds are changed: Kofi's, by the arrival of the bridge construction crew in Owurasu; Adamo's, by the smallpox epidemic which shatters his community,

severing his ties with the ancestral spirits. The loss finally leads Adamo to adopt the West African regiment as his new community. For both men, the confrontation with alien perceptions has tragic consequences.

In exploring their failure to come to terms with these new perceptions, Laurence underscores the irony of Kofi's and Adamo's initial efforts to embrace them. Such efforts represent one thread of a recurring pattern in Laurence's work: that of the individual's desire to escape the past. Kofi's desire is evident in his attempt to adopt the ways of the bridgemen and in his decision to serve the bridge as priest. In accepting the foreigners' new tomorrow, he denies the role and the values prescribed for him by the past. Similarly, Adamo's rejection of the past is suggested by the fact that he hears the voices of the past less and less distinctly as the voices of the regiment become more familiar. His efforts to fulfill his new responsibilities as a regimental drummer suggest his belief that the past is forever lost.

While Kofi and Adamo thus believe that they have escaped the past, Laurence shows their efforts to be futile, for the past remains with them in the form of present perceptions. Kofi sees the bridge not as a manmade structure of steel but as a powerful god. Adamo views his new community through the eyes of a bushman concerned not to offend the forces which claim power over him. Essentially, each man's vision is rooted in past beliefs and each is limited by these beliefs.

That such limitation leads ultimately to death forcibly underscores

Laurence's perception of the past's destructive power. Kofi dies when, in an attempt to absorb his new god's spirit into himself, he stands at the highest point of the bridge and looks directly into the sun. He has been metaphorically blinded by his misconception regarding the nature of the bridge; literally blinded by the intensity of the sun's light, he slips and falls to his death in the river below. Symbolically, the past draws Kofi back into itself and he does not resurface.[5] Adamo also dies because he fails to understand the truth of the alien culture. When he learns that he has been discharged from the army even though he has faithfully followed orders, he kills Captain Fossey. Adamo believes that the Captain's death will ensure his place in the regiment; ironically, he is right, for he will stay with the regiment for the rest of his life, until he is executed for his crime.

In "The Rain Child," Laurence further explores the problem of limited cultural perspectives central to her consideration of background in "The Tomorrow-Tamer" and "The Voices of Adamo." Through her characterization of Ruth Quansah, she adds an ironic twist to the theme of cultural alienation, for Ruth identifies not with her African ancestry but with England, the country where she was born and which shaped her sense of self. When she returns "home" to Africa, she is unable to understand or adjust to a culture which she views as alien but which her father, her teachers, and her classmates regard as her true heritage. Admittedly, Ruth does attempt to resolve her dilemma. In an effort to affirm her English identity, she befriends David Mackie; however, he eventually tells her that the friendship can not continue. Later, she attempts symbolically to claim her African heritage by having sexual

relations with Yindo, but she has chosen a boy who is himself an outcast, a desert man far from his tribe. Predictably, this encounter also fails. Essentially, Ruth is trapped between cultures. Unable to fully accept or understand her African heritage because she sees herself as English, Ruth is rejected by her African classmates. Yet she is not accepted by the English because they see her as African. There is no firm indication in the story that Ruth will ever come to terms with who she is.

The dark side of Laurence's perception of the past also emerges in "The Merchant of Heaven" and "The Drummer of All The World." Here Laurence explores the theme of cultural alienation from the perspective of the limitations imposed by religious background. In these stories, Laurence does not deal directly with the influences which shaped Brother Lemon's or Matthew's father's religious zeal, other than to suggest that Brother Lemon finds the golden and bejewelled heaven promised by the Angel of Philadelphia sect so appealing because he was so poor as a child. Rather, the shaping power of background is implied by each man's fervent belief in his mission. The limitations imposed by background are revealed by each man's refusal to acknowledge the humanity of those he would convert.

Laurence is thus critical of religious perceptions which blind each man to the need for compassion and understanding inherent in his message of enlightenment and salvation. Brother Lemon, for example, finds the idea of a black Christ both incomprehensible and shocking, a reaction which reveals his belief that blacks are inferior. His fear

that the Africans will never share his "right" vision of a white Christ integral to his conception of salvation finally defeats his mission. Similarly, Matthew's father's mistrust of Africans is reflected in his efforts to erase all evidence of their history and culture. He denies thereby not only the Africans' heritage but their humanity as well. Again, such a denial defeats the white man's mission.[6]

While these stories centre on Laurence's criticism of the past as a source of limitation, there is evidence in The Tomorrow-Tamer collection that she also sees the past as a means to self-knowledge and inner freedom. For such freedom to be attained, Laurence believes, the individual must find some means of coming to terms with the past. Indeed, such a position is implicit in her exploration of the past's restrictive power. By showing that Kofi, Adamo, Brother Lemon, and Matthew's father remain blind to the restrictions imposed by background, to the fact that their perceptions are wrong, Laurence implies that one must at least be aware of the influence of the past if one is to be freed from such restrictions. And through Ruth Quansah's exile, Laurence implies the need for understanding one's heritage if one is to know oneself. However, elsewhere Laurence is more explicit in her depiction of the potential for good inherent in coming to terms with the past. This positive side of her vision emerges in "The Drummer of All the World," "The Pure Diamond Man," "Godman Pira," and "The Perfume Sea."

Through Matthew in "The Drummer of All the World," for example, Laurence shows the possibility for self-knowledge inherent in facing

one's limitations. Unlike his father, Matthew sees his brand of salvation in the preservation of Africa's past, but he comes to understand the limitations of his vision by understanding the restrictions he would place on African life.

Part of Matthew's desire to preserve the ancient rituals and beliefs is based on the pleasure which the tales and traditions gave him as a young child. The sadness which he feels when he returns to a changing Africa after an absence of several years is the result of his desire to preserve the past of his own childhood, to retain the image of himself as a boy listening to the drums or walking with Kwabena past the hut where death lived. In watching the old Africa die, Matthew also sees that the world of his childhood has passed, and he does not want to accept the loss. However, he learns that the vision of Africa's past, integral to his vision of his own past, is incomplete. When he accepts Kwabena's argument that the "pretty stories about big spiders" often served to mask rather than to alleviate the reality of sickness, hunger, and fear, on one level the enchanted land of Matthew's childhood disappears (TT 17).[7] By acknowledging the pain, Matthew is freed from his desire to have Africa's "antique quaintness . . . remain unchanged" (TT 18). Yet unlike Kwabena, Matthew still sees the beauty and the exultation amid the squalor and the pain, and in this regard he does retain something of value from the past. Moreover, while he must return to England, he knows that Africa--her beauty and her squalor--will remain with him always in his memories. He is thus freed from the limitations of his past perception, while at the same time he must acknowledge his experiences in Africa as an essential

part of his make-up and therefore something he will always carry within him.

In "The Pure Diamond Man" and "Godman's Master," the positive side of Laurence's conception of the past emerges in her consideration of the value of coming to terms with one's cultural heritage. In the former story, Laurence offers a humorous counterpoint to her usually serious treatment of this theme. Tetteh is a young man who has left his tribal village and is determined to make his fortune in the city. Ironically, he falls into a profit-making venture particularly suited to his background as an African bushman: he offers, for a fee, to show Philip Hardacre the mysterious rites of the ju-ju man of Gyakrom, who is in reality Tetteh's father and who has been for many years an elder in the mission church. Tetteh is, of course, trying to take advantage of Hardacre's gullibility, but the trick is basically a good-natured joke which is saved from tawdriness by Tetteh's fair play in putting on a good show. The play-acting of the traditional rituals is Tetteh's means of acknowledging the past; although his first effort fails, his self-confidence is renewed by his inspired decision to market "Bonsu Corn Cure/Best All-African Remedy." Tetteh's heritage thus proves its potential for profit and reaffirms his faith in his ability to survive in the city where he now lives.

In "Godman's Master," Godman Pira also comes to terms with his heritage, although he initially denies the past by escaping the box in which he has been imprisoned by his village priest and by fleeing with Moses Adu to the city. The box is a symbolic chain tying Godman to the

fears inspired by the power of the old gods, and his escape is a denial of this aspect of his cultural history. Yet the city offers no refuge from fear. It is only when Godman becomes a jester/oracle with a travelling circus, an act which symbolizes his acceptance of the traditional pirafo's role, that he finds, if not total freedom, at least a means of surviving despite his fears.

Finally, in "The Perfume Sea," Laurence again centres on the importance of acknowledging the past. Both Mr. Archipelago and Doree have attempted to erase their past lives by shrouding them in mystery. Indeed, Mr. Archipelago's description of his life as a "sea with many islands" suggests exile both in place and in time, an isolating and separating of experiences. In effect, the little hairdresser and his assistant keep their pasts hidden to create new identities as mysterious and thereby special persons. However, their plan serves only to render their lives empty and isolated. When they are finally able to confess that neither has had the "troubled" and therefore special past at which each has previously hinted, they confess their own very ordinary humanity. In acknowledging the past, Mr. Archipelago and Doree are freed from their desire to remain guarded from one another. The result is a shared sense of belonging and greater self-fulfillment.

Laurence's perception of the past both as a source of misunderstanding and as a means to self-knowledge thus serves as a linking thread in The Tomorrow-Tamer collection. These perceptions also provide the basis for Laurence's depiction of life in Ghana in This Side Jordan. In this novel, she describes the limitations imposed by background in

terms both of the fears of Englishmen who struggle to maintain their preferred social and economic position in the face of Ghana's impending Independence and of the uncertainty of Africans such as Nathaniel Amegbe who must choose between old ways and new. While the English for the most part do not move beyond the past's restrictive power, Johnnie Kestoe and Nathaniel do gain self-knowledge and freedom through confronting their fears and acknowledging what is of value in the past.

In her depiction of the English in This Side Jordan, Laurence again considers background as a source of alienation and fear. The English identify with their lost island home, and their life in Africa has been in large part an attempt to recreate that home, to keep one corner of a foreign field "forever England." Laurence conveys this attempt through the description of Cora Thayer's bungalow, decorated with chintz curtains and watercolours of Windsor Castle and the Lake District. As Cora tells Johnnie Kestoe, "Africa shan't enter here."[8] Nor shall Africa enter the Club, that physical and metaphoric sanctuary of exiled whitemen who meet to mourn for their lost England. This need to recreate home through physical surroundings suggests more than a desire to surround oneself with familiar objects: it reflects a need to shut out anything foreign, to seal oneself within a cultural womb. Through their surroundings the English affirm their identity as English, but they also affirm their alienation from the country where they now live. Their alienation is heightened, moreover, by their distrust of Africans and by their fear that Africans seeking membership will desecrate the sanctity

of the Club. The Club members jealously guard the isolation which allows them an illusion of superiority and which protects them from a people and a way of life they refuse to know and therefore resent. Unable to acknowledge that they are wrong, the English never move beyond the limitations of their particular cultural bias.

Unlike those English who defend their position of "us" against "them," Johnnie Kestoe is able to overcome, to some extent, the limitations imposed by his cultural background. His hatred of blacks has been intensified by an incident which remains an ugly scar in his memory: the threat to an already precarious existence posed when Johnnie's father lost his job to a Jamaican. However, when Johnnie is confronted by the pain he has inflicted on the young African prostitute whom he rapes, he suddenly sees her as a person rather than as an anonymous being. In accepting her humanity, he moves beyond the hatred which characterized his past perception. His encounter with the girl forces him to confront the fact of his limited perception and frees him to respond in sympathy to her. In turn, Johnnie's understanding of the girl's pain frees him to admit his sympathy for his mother, who died in agony after a self-induced abortion. Johnnie is thus able to come to terms with another past limitation by expiating his guilt for having hated his mother.[9]

More central to the novel is Laurence's concern with the influence of background on Africans such as Nathaniel Amegbe who must establish a new life for themselves in their changing land. Nathaniel feels caught "between yesterday and today" (TSJ 106). "But that," remarks his uncle,

"is nowhere" (TSJ 107). Nathaniel's search for somewhere establishes the basic conflict in the novel. Torn between old gods and new, between the offer of prestige and security within his tribe as secretary to the chief and his need to lay claim to Futura's promise that the future is his, Nathaniel remains trapped between times. Before he can establish a new life within the new Ghana, he must make peace with the past, both personal and cultural.

Laurence's sense of "tribalism" again emerges in her treatment of the influence which the ancient beliefs and old ways of village life maintain over Nathaniel. Nathaniel's former gods, for example, make their presence felt in the insecurity and confusion he experiences in trying to sort out his present religious views. His uncertainty leads him to assert at one point that a "man is better off to have no god" (TSJ 69). Although he no longer reveres either the tribal gods or the God given him by the priests in the mission school, he can not escape belief. Indeed, at times, such as when Nathaniel dreams of Jesus crossing the river Jordan "arrayed like a King of Ashanti" (TSJ 77), the two systems merge in a fantastic and confusing vision which leaves Nathaniel even more perplexed.[10] Similarly, Nathaniel's background as a tribal villager undermines his confidence in his ability to maintain his teaching position in Accra. While he wants to escape his tribal past and establish a new life which will ally him with Ghana's future, Nathaniel's self-doubts finally overrule his conviction that the past is dead, and he accepts a position as secretary to his tribal chief. He hopes to return thereby to the security of the old ways.

Through Nathaniel's fears, then, Laurence again conveys the negative aspects of tribalism and implies the need to confront these restrictive fears if one is to be freed from them. Nathaniel does finally confront his fears through his decision to remain with Futura. The decision is inspired to some extent by Nathaniel's realization that the security offered by the river of the tribal womb is the security of total dependence, that self and freedom are submerged in the river which laps "around the little fish, holding him so that he might not learn lungs" (TSJ 247). In accepting the future rather than returning totally to the past, Nathaniel moves beyond his need for such security. He is thus able to complete the transition from village to city life.

While Nathaniel does not return to the past, he does not deny the past altogether. Rather, Laurence balances Nathaniel's desire to embrace the future with his need to acknowledge what is of value in the past. He does so in religious terms by making his peace with the spirit of his dead father. When Nathaniel accepts that Kyerema does not walk in his son's Christian hell but dwells honoured in the house of Nyankopan, Nathaniel acknowledges the respect he owes to his past relationship with his father. Having thus laid both his old gods and his father's spirit to rest, Nathaniel is able to confess that his "god is the God of [his] own soul," of the soul which the mission priests gave him when he was a boy (TSJ 275). When Nathaniel affirms his Christianity, the conflict between the two ideologies is resolved. On a cultural level, Nathaniel's decision to remain as a teacher in Accra constitutes an affirmation of the value of the past, for in agreeing to remain with Futura, Nathaniel affirms his position as a teacher of history and his

belief in the course on African Civilizations of the Past which he teaches. For Nathaniel, the value of the past is contingent on the future, on the fact that the people of Ghana will inherit "their earth" with the coming of Independence; and the value of the future is contingent on the past, for Nathaniel will teach his students that there "must be pride and roots" and that "Ghana, empire of their forefathers, [will] rise again to be a glory to [her] people" (TSJ 22). Nathaniel's affirmation of the past, which is for him an affirmation of the future, therefore both conveys Laurence's perception of the continuity between generations and suggests the means to a positive and hopeful alliance between them.

In the African works, Laurence therefore expresses her concern with how background limits perception through her depiction of characters--both African and white--whose inability or refusal to move beyond the controlling power of the ancestors leads to alienation and even death. At the same time, the very blindness of these characters to their limitations suggests the need for confronting and understanding the past if one is to be freed from its restrictive power. Furthermore, Laurence affirms the past through such characters as Matthew in "The Drummer of All the World" and Nathaniel Amegbe in <u>This Side Jordan</u>, who come to know themselves through understanding their relationship to the past. While the African short stories and novel thus reveal Laurence's perception of the past as a source of limitation, they also convey her belief in the inescapability of the past and the necessity of finding some means of coming to terms with it.

Chapter Two

The same concern with the interaction between past and present which characterizes Laurence's African fiction emerges in the novels and short stories of the Manawaka cycle, for the same perceptions which shaped Laurence's understanding of African life also shaped her understanding of the Canadian experience. If a shift in focus between the African and Canadian works must be anknowledged, it is that the emphasis in the Canadian fiction on background as a shaping force and on the necessity of coming to terms with the past is even more intense. Because Laurence is writing from her own roots, she is more perceptually attuned to the historical, social, and cultural forces which are the basis of Canadian life and therefore is more confident in dealing with these forces within an artistic framework. Thus Laurence can say in "Ten Years' Sentences,"

> A strange aspect of my so-called Canadian writing is that I haven't been much aware of its being Canadian, and this seems a good thing to me, for it suggests that one has been writing out of a background so closely known that no explanatory tags are necessary. I was always conscious that the novel and stories set in Ghana were <u>about Africa</u>. My last three novels just seem like novels.[1]

A further reason for the greater emphasis on time in the Canadian fiction is that Laurence views these works as a means of coming to terms with her own background. As she has noted in a conversation

with Robert Kroetsch and in her essay "A Place to Stand On," the artistic transition from Africa to Canada was inevitable.[2] This transition signified for Laurence a spiritual coming to terms with the past as a means to self-understanding. What Laurence had come to see more and more clearly on a personal level was what she had already "seen" and dealt with on an artistic level in her earlier fiction--the inescapability of the past. In exploring her own background, Laurence uses background itself as a central theme.

A final reason for Laurence's growing artistic preoccupation with the present as a function of the past is suggested by her comments in a conversation with Bernice Lever:

> For some time now, we have been writing very much out of our own culture, our own background and our own heritage. What I get into my work, I hope, is a very strong sense of place and of our own culture. I'm writing very deeply out of that. If Canadian writers can do anything, it is to give Canadians a very strong sense of who they are. Our writers can effect this whole struggle simply by forging our myths and giving voice to our history, to our legends, to our cultural being. . . .[3]

If these words may be taken as a statement of Laurence's artistic purpose in the Manawaka stories, then her treatment of character, which involves an effort to get down all of the past forces which have shaped a character's essential self, proves to be her means of giving voice to the Canadian "cultural being." Thus, while Laurence comes to terms with her background through her art, she also comes to terms with her art through her focus on background as a shaping force.

In the first three novels of the Manawaka cycle, Laurence looks at the darker elements of the Canadian experience through an exploration of the legacy of emotional repression, failed communication, and insecurities and self-doubts inherited by generations of Manawaka residents. In The Stone Angel, Laurence traces this legacy to pioneers such as Hagar Shipley, whose pride and independent spirit, while providing her with a means of survival and self-assertion in a new world, prove also to be a source of alienation and loss. Laurence's conception of time in the novel encompasses a more distant legacy, however, for Hagar has been shaped by the values of a Scots Presbyterian father who is himself the reflection of his cultural and personal past. The ancestors thus affirm their presence in the continuing influence they exert over their descendants; their restrictive powers are evident in the pride, concern with respectability, and stubborn self-restraint which make Hagar's life a lonely and isolated wilderness.

In this novel, Laurence conveys the presence of the past through her depiction of Hagar's pride, which is largely an image of her father's pride in both his cultural heritage and his social position in Manawaka. Jason Currie keeps his cultural past alive through the stories which he tells his children of their valorous ancestors, the Highland Curries: he views the stories as both a symbolic link with the past and an affirmation of its values. Jason's pride in his ancestors is reflected in Hagar's pride in being descended from good Highland blood. Furthermore, while she secretly regrets that her father ever abandoned Scotland for the "bald-headed" Canadian prairie, Hagar prides herself on the fact that his position in Manawaka, a

position attained through the Scots Presbyterian values of perseverance and hard work, allows her to take her place in one of the only "half a dozen decent brick houses" in town.[4]

Besides the haughtiness inherent in Hagar's belief that she is socially superior, her pride also assumes the form of compliance with a code of decency in keeping with her family's socially respectable position. In Jason Currie, decency manifests itself as a refusal to allow the illegitimate Lottie Drieser to attend his children's parties; in Hagar, as a preoccupation with clothes as symbolic of social acceptability. Jason Currie's concern with decorum is so ingrained in Hagar that even after her fall from Manawaka grace, she is careful to wear a rose silk suit when visiting Lottie about John and Arlene. The suit is a means of showing "No Name" Lottie that Hagar still retains a sense of her proper place, even if Lottie has forgotten hers.[5] Indeed, at only one point in Hagar's life does her dress belie her code of decency--during her marriage to Bram, when she descends to wearing Marvin's old black coat and an unmatched scarf and tam when she goes into Manawaka to sell her eggs. When Hagar confronts her changed image in the town's Rest Room mirror, she literally does not recognize herself. At this point, Hagar determines to get at the "truer image" beneath the "lying glass" by buying clothes to render her decent (SA 133).

While Hagar's perception of herself underscores Laurence's perception of the negative influences of background, the limitations considered thus far are relatively minor, consisting primarily of pettiness and snobbery. Admittedly, Hagar's sense of decorum does contribute to the

failure of her marriage, for her attempts to reshape Bram into a "respectable" man work only to alienate her from her husband; when she can no longer battle the "pigweed" and "slime," she finally flees. However, Laurence reveals the restrictive power of the past in its most devastating form through her description of the emotional self-restraint which Hagar inherits from her father and which blights her relationship with others throughout her life.

While Hagar's stubborn nature is admittedly inborn, her father's influence is evident in the means by which she expresses her stubbornness. In particular, Hagar has inherited her father's refusal to open himself to others, a reserve conveyed by his inability to articulate or even understand his emotions when he punishes Hagar for embarrassing him in front of customers. He goes so far as to compliment Hagar on her "backbone" when she refuses to cry. While Hagar would agree that her refusal to express emotion is a sign of inner strength, her need for control so comes to obsess her that she fears any emotional display, other than annoyance or anger, as a sign of weakness. This is not to say that Hagar is incapable of compassion or love, or that she is blind to the fact that she views the barriers she sets against self-revelation as a means of protection. For example, she feels compassion for her dying brother Dan, "wanting above all else" to wear her mother's shawl to comfort him, but she must confess years later that she was "unable to bend enough" because she did not want to appear weak (SA 25). She can acknowledge the concern she felt for Marvin when he left for war, revealing that she wanted "to hold him tightly, plead with him, against all reason and reality, not to go," but admits that her

stubborn composure did not allow her to open to him (SA 129). And she can admit that her hatred of weakness did not allow her to cry over John's death, although she recalls that her inner thoughts were of all that she had wanted to say to him to set things "to rights" (SA 243). Hagar is therefore not without humanity; rather, what she can not see throughout most of her life is that emotional display is not a manifestation of weakness nor the prideful refusal to display emotion always a manifestation of inner strength. It is in this regard that the influence of background on Hagar is most destructive. In effect, Hagar's self-restraint forces her to deny her humanity and isolates her thereby not only from others but from her own virtues.

Through Hagar, therefore, Laurence again reveals the past as a source of alienation and failed communication. Moreover, the limitations which Hagar has inherited are passed on to succeeding generations of Manawaka residents. This is not to say that Laurence believes that people do not change from one generation to the next, but that the change is slow in coming and that the transformation is never complete.[6] Indeed, in her consideration of Rachel Cameron in A Jest of God, Laurence suggests that these are changes in degree and not in kind. While Hagar's stubborn self-restraint masks itself as independence and strength, Rachel's fear of self-expression manifests itself as submissiveness and extreme self-consciousness. As much as was Hagar, Rachel is a victim of the past, both of her personal history and her cultural heritage. Rachel has been shaped by a mother who herself embodies the perceptions of a community clearly rooted in the values of propriety and respectability inherited from the Manawaka of Jason Currie. The

ancestors, whose present embodiment is Mrs. Cameron, are also by implication the spirits of Manawaka's founding pioneers. Through her description of Rachel's insecurities and fears, Laurence further explores the negative aspects of the ancestors' controlling influence.

This influence is particularly evident in the means by which Rachel expresses her inherent sensitivity to appearances. Her sense of decorum is shaped by a mother whose concern with propriety extends to the fear that her friends will think it "odd" that Rachel goes out on bridge night or that it looks "peculiar" when Rachel goes for solitary evening walks. Although Rachel denigrates her mother's compulsive regard for propriety, she also shares it. While Rachel thus speaks deprecatingly of her mother's being "shocked to the core" should the minister of their church "suddenly lose his mind and speak of God with anguish or joy," Rachel herself can not bear the thought of Calla perhaps rising in her Tabernacle to speak ecstatic utterances.[7] Rachel's essential fear is that she can not "bear watching people make fools of themselves." Such incidents, she claims, threaten her (JG 27). The threat is that she may be seen to be part of that particular company herself, a threat all the more fearful because of her belief that being laughable is worse than being unbalanced. In Rachel's view, even dying is a source of discomfiture, an attitude suggested by her embarrassment over her father's occupation and her dream of the "silent people . . . powdered whitely like clowns" in her father's mortuary (JG 19).

Rachel's fear that she will behave in some way incompatible with her mother's and her community's code of appropriate behaviour does not

mean, it must be noted, that Rachel is totally incapable of independent thought. Her internalization of her community's values is not complete. For example, despite her inhibitions and despite her denials of what she is doing, Rachel can not resist masturbating. Moreover, she admits that she has never shared her mother's view about a woman's "most precious possession," although until her affair with Nick she has never been able to rid herself of that "unwanted burden" (JG 90). Nor does her skeptical approach to the Tabernacle's version of Christ, painted to show "his heart exposed and bristling with thorns like a scarlet pincushion," make her prefer the "pretty and clean-cut Jesus expiring gently and with absolutely no inconvenience" who is the symbol of her mother's church (JG 30, 41). And despite Rachel's fear of emotional display, her heart is not hardened, for she is capable of loving James Doherty and later, Nick Kazlik. Rather, in her depiction of the fear Rachel suffers that her emotions will break through her pleasant and passive exterior, Laurence reveals the insidiousness of the power of the ancestors, for their insistence on decorum and restraint compels Rachel to suppress her capacity for self-expression and love.

Moreover, the fact that Rachel's need to suppress these qualities contributes to her feelings of insubstantiality and dissociation from self again underscores Laurence's criticism of the ancestors as a source of alienation. Rachel's feelings of dissociation are evident, for example, in her description of her image "reflected dimly, like the negative of a photograph" in the display windows of stores which she passes on her way to the Tabernacle. The image is distorted, taller and thinner, "a thin streak of a person, like the stroke of a white

chalk on a blackboard" (JG 29). On another occasion she sees herself reflected in a mirror as a "featureless face," a "thin, stiff white feather . . . caught up and hurtled by some wind no one else could feel" (JG 153). Essentially, Rachel sees herself as a somewhat grotesque apparition glimpsed for a passing moment in a reflecting surface, a being without significance, permanence, or dimension.

For Rachel Cameron, as for Hagar Shipley, the limitations imposed by background assume the form of a compulsive regard for appearances and therefore a need for self-restraint which leads to isolation, alienation, and failed communication. Stacey MacAindra in The Fire-Dwellers is also a victim of these restrictive forces, although the Manawaka legacy again manifests itself in a somewhat altered form. While Stacey is admittedly less reserved than Rachel, and although she does try to communicate with her family, she has also inherited a degree of self-restraint which inhibits communication. As a child reacting to her parents' ineptitude, she promised herself that she would not fall victim to their failure. Through Stacey's present difficulties, Laurence underscores both the restrictive power of the past and the ironic discrepancy between childhood expectation and adult reality.

Stacey's inability to communicate with her children or say whatever is necessary to make Mac take her seriously is a manifestation of the "tomb silences" of her own parents. Again, this points to Laurence's concern with the past as a source of isolation, for Stacey's background has not given her the means to be fully open with

others. Stacey is a victim not only of her parents' failed communication, moreover, but of the past influences which have shaped her husband, for Mac has inherited his reticence and his tendency to misinterpret Stacey's remarks from a father who is himself restrained and often imperceptive. Stacey and Mac have been taught that "nice" or decent people do not talk about fear or pain, their own or others'. Stacey understands the limitations of this belief, but her inability to free herself totally from its influence leads her to remark that everyone in the family is "one dimensional," an image which conveys Stacey's feelings of dissociation from her husband and children (FD 80).

While Laurence thus reveals the restrictive power of the ancestors to limit communication and understanding, she shows that Stacey is also, ironically, a victim of her past perception that people really "ought to be strong and loving and [able] to rear kids with whom it would be possible to talk" (FD 170). Stacey's childhood belief that she would grow up to be a better parent than her own mother and father leads her as an adult to doubt her ability to "cope" with present roles and responsibilities. She feels incompetent as a mother in particular: believing that she is not strong enough to prevent the holocaust of social violence and destruction which she sees closing in on Bluejay Crescent, Stacey perforce falls short of her ideal of mother as the ultimate protector of her children. Stacey's continuing belief that completely open communication between family members is possibe, or even desirable, moreover, compounds her frustration. She wants communication on her terms--people speaking their private thoughts and feelings, giving her the words which are the keys to their "locked rooms."

As Stacey notes, "How can anyone know unless people say?" (FD 167). She at least can not know unless people say, and it is precisely her inability to break through the barrier of Mac's reticence or to raise children with whom she can talk which leads to feelings of inadequacy and isolation.

Stacey's self-doubts, furthermore, underscore Laurence's perception of the limitations of concern with outward show so integral to the Manawaka legacy. In Mrs. Cameron, the concern assumed the form of a horror of public dance halls as anathema to girls who wished to be respected; Stacey's emerges as the fear that she is not doing her duty, or at least appearing to be doing her duty as wife and mother according to the expectations of society. Indeed, Stacey internalizes those expectations to the extent that she judges herself according to how others--particularly writers of magazine articles on "effective parenting"--define and judge her roles. Does she brandish a metaphoric knife, as the magazines imply, to "castrate" her son and "emasculate" her husband? Is she engaging in those nine activities most likely to ruin her daughter? How far will she go in warping the minds and lives of those under her charge? In effect, Stacey measures herself against the values of popular psychology and finds herself wanting.

Stacey's inherited regard for proper appearances is also conveyed by her compulsive desire for everything to be "all right," a need which often leads Stacey into lies and small subterfuges. For the sake of maintaining a semblance of peace in the family, Stacey promises Mac, without conviction, that she will stop babying Duncan. And for the

sake of "going along with the game" because life is "easier that way," Stacey insists that the children go to Sunday School, even though she herself has no strong religious convictions, as a means of appeasing Mac's father, a retired minister (FD 71). The game of evasions necessitated by Stacey's preoccupation with outward show extends, moreover, to her relationship with her neighbours. She will never be able to confront Tess about the goldfish incident, and so must go to extensive measures to keep young Jen out of Tess's clutches. It must be noted that Stacey is not happy with her "tapestry of phoniness," for she feels both ensnared and diminished by her lies. "Where have I gone?" she questions. "How to stop telling lies? How to get out?" (FD 73).

Laurence therefore criticizes the controlling hand of the ancestors through her consideration of the limitations--Hagar's isolation, Rachel's insecurity, and Stacey's frustrations--which background has imposed. However, through her characterization of each woman, Laurence also shows that total escape from the past is futile; partial freedom from its restrictive power must be achieved through confronting the past. Hagar's memories eventually trigger her emotional release; Rachel and Stacey accept that change is possible only within the context of who they already are. The past itself thereby proves the means to self-knowledge and inner freedom.

Throughout The Stone Angel, Hagar does come face to face with the past through the memories which rise, unbidden, to the surface of her present life.[8] While Hagar acknowledges her pride and stubbornness, even to the extent that she confesses the many occasions when

self-restraint serves as a protective barrier against self-revelation, she has not yet learned from her confrontation with time how vast a wilderness her life has been. She can not see that her hatred of showing weakness has been so inwardly devastating or that her need for control has so severely limited her capacity to experience joy in what life has offered. However, time in the form of memory finally releases Hagar, to some extent, from her prison of self-sufficiency and serves thereby as a means to greater self-understanding.

Hagar's confrontation with time takes place during her stay in the abandoned fish cannery at Shadow Point. Ironically, she has initially sought in Shadow Point a refuge against time, for the move to Silverthreads Nursing Home is symbolic for Hagar of the passing of time. She sees in the move not only the loss of her valued furniture, the "shreds and remnants" of her life in which she hopes for a form of permanence her own changing flesh belies, but also death--the ultimate manifestation of the passage of time. Hagar believes that she will leave Silverthreads only in a coffin. Her flight to Shadow Point is therefore an attempt to deny the process of time; indeed, she tries to cut herself off from the past altogether by cancelling what has gone before and beginning again in a new place.

However, Laurence again conveys the futility of any such attempt, for Hagar has chosen a place which is itself a manifestation of time, "a place of remnants and oddities" which are the tangible evidence of time past and of decay. Nor can Hagar herself begin anew here, for she has brought with her all of the past attitudes and perceptions

which form her essential self. She has carried with her her fear of emotional display, as is evident in her disgust at the panicked flight of the trapped gull. She is so frightened by the bird's panic because the emotion is so pure and uncontrolled. But she has also carried with her her inherent need for human companionship which she has for so long tried to suppress. This need is affirmed by her thoughts as she drinks with Murray Lees in the cannery:

> Outside, the sea muzzles at the floorboards that edge the water. If I were alone, I wouldn't find the sound soothing in the slightest. I'd be drawn out and out, with each receding layer of water to its beginning, a depth as alien and chill as some far frozen planet, a night sea hoarding sly-eyed serpents, killer whales, swarming phosphorescent creatures dead to the daytime, a black sea sucking everything into itself, the spent gull, the trivial garbage from boats, and men protected from eternity only by their soft and fearful flesh and their seeing eyes. But I have a companion and so I'm safe, and the sea is only the sound of water slapping against the planking. (SA 224-25)

The night sea suggests both the threat of an alien and hostile universe and the anonymity of death, which indiscriminately sucks everything into itself. The image of man's "fearful flesh" and "seeing eyes" as his only protection against eternity conveys the tenuous nature of existence, but it also suggests the idea of life and perception contained together against death. Whatever the frailty of flesh, it is flesh and seeing eyes which separate the living from the dead, and Hagar's eyes are "seeing" enough for her to know this. Moreover, at this point she is able to admit her need for human contact as a form of security against the "night sea." Indeed, it is Murray Lees'

presence which confines Hagar's vision to the realm of imaginary "if" and which renders the sound of the sea harmless, even soothing. His presence, and his recounting of the death of his son, also lead Hagar into her own private reliving of John's death and her release from the total bondage of self-restraint.

Hagar's recounting of John's death is not an open confession to Lees, nor does she intend him to see her tears. Nonetheless, the confession of grief inherent in her weeping is real. Nor are the words of apology and love offered to John--words which will put things "to rights"--less real because she only imagines John in Lees. In confronting the past, Hagar is released into a self-expression of love and grief which in turn allows her to open herself more fully to others. She can afterward touch Lees through word and action in an expression of sympathy and compassion for the death of his son. In hospital, she can befriend Elva Jardine, can allow herself to tell Doris that Mr. Troy's visit was helpful, can express her love for Marvin by telling him that he has been a better son to her than John. Even Hagar's effort to bring a bedpan for Sandra Wong is an expression of concern for another's humiliation and pain. By acknowledging her sympathy, compassion, and love variously to others, Hagar acknowledges both their humanity and her own sense of alliance with the human community.

Furthermore, the freeing of her sympathy in turn frees Hagar to accept the message inherent in Mr. Troy's hymn--that life can offer joy. She now confronts her past refusal to acknowledge this fact. While many critics regard Hagar's reaction to the hymn as an indication of

her insight into the fact of her pride, I believe that the incident reveals her awareness of the consequences of her pride. Hagar has always known that she is proud; but she has always seen her pride, manifested in her self-restraint, as a source of strength. She now sees that her strength has been her destruction. By implication, she acknowledges that self-restraint can be a form of weakness[9] and the willingness to show "weakness" a strength.

Through confronting the past and coming to terms with her grief, then, Hagar is freed to express those qualities--her capacity for love and her desire for communication and companionship--which she has for so long kept hidden. In view of Laurence's conception of the presence of the past, however, we must not assume that the prideful and independent Hagar has been altogether banished.[10] Indeed, she has for so long had her way that she continues to maintain the upper hand. Even a moment before death, Hagar's pride compels her to wrest the glass of water from the nurses's hand to drink for herself. Yet at the same time Hagar acknowledges that she defeats herself by not accepting the nurse's help. Laurence thus establishes a balance of sorts between Hagar's fear of appearing weak and her willingness to admit her need for others, that is, between Hagar's ties to the past and her capacity for change. In the final lines of the novel, Laurence conveys the extent to which one is bound with the other, for she implies that Hagar's last act of self-assertion--her raging against death--is also Hagar's final attempt to affirm her alliance with the human community, to remain among "all people that on earth do dwell."

As does Hagar, Rachel gains some measure of freedom from the restrictions imposed by the past by confronting her limitations. She challenges her code of decency through her decision not to abort the child she believes she carries or to accept suicide as an escape from her community's condemnation. She is able to come to terms with her fear of appearing foolish, moreover, through both confessing her vulnerability and accepting her own fallible humanity. She can ally herself with all the "nuts and oddballs" who turn to God as a last resort (JG 171). And she can see the irony of her decision to bear her child when she learns that the suspected foetus is actually a non-malignant uterine tumour:

> All that. And this at the end of it. I was always afraid that I might become a fool. Yet I could almost smile with some grotesque lightheadedness at that fool of a fear, that poor fear of fools, now that I really am one. (JG 181)

In admitting herself to that company of fools she has for so long dreaded, Rachel discovers that her fears are not so "terrible" or terrifying after all. Her confrontation with fear frees her to assume greater responsibility for her life--to accept both the fact that her relationship with Nick is irretrievably broken and the challenge of leaving her known world of Manawaka for a new and uncertain life on the west coast.

While Rachel thus comes to terms with the past by asserting herself against her limitations, her final step toward self-knowledge comes with her acceptance that she will never escape these limitations altogether, that the future Rachel will be in many respects the same

as the present woman, with the same self-consciousness, the same fear and loneliness, the same concern with proper appearances. As Laurence herself has noted, Rachel "is perceptive enough to recognize that for her no freedom from the ancestors can be total."[11] Rachel's acceptance of this fact does not imply that her future will be entirely black, for Laurence indicates at the novel's close that although the proper Rachel will most often maintain the upper hand, the Rachel generally suppressed will be freed occasionally to reveal herself in lightheadedness, lightheartedness, and song.

In The Fire-Dwellers, Stacey's means of coming to terms with the past, like Rachel's, involves a final acceptance that life can offer no promise of radical change. The acceptance does not come easily to Stacey, as is evident in her desire to escape the accumulated responsibilities and "abrasions" of the past sixteen years of married life for a simpler life symbolized by her memories of the freedom she enjoyed as a young, single woman.[12] Stacey sees the chance to "go away and throw all of [her baggage] overboard" in her affair with Luke Venturi: "I'd like to start again, everything, all of life, start again, with someone like you--with you--with everything simpler and clearer" (FD 236, 205). While Stacey seeks in her relationship with Luke the freedom from encumbrances by which she feels burdened, she actually finds what she has always inherently known--that the life she wants is with her family.

In accepting the commitments and responsibilities of married life, Stacey also accepts that her future will not vary from established

patterns to any great degree. As she admits, "Now I see that whatever I'm like, I'm pretty well stuck with it for life. Hell of a revelation that turned out to be" (FD 298). She will be "stuck" to a large extent with the same frustrations and insecurities as in the past, but in deciding to "cope" with rather than flee her situation, she finds a basis from which to confront her limitations. She confronts her reticence to admit that things are not always "all right" by confessing to Mac her terror of the world's capacity for self-destruction. And she confronts her fear that others are withholding themselves from her by accepting that the silences are not all bad, that they can even protect. Moreover, in accepting that Mac will never be able to speak his emotions in "full technicolor and intense detail" (FD 296), Stacey implies that in future she will be more receptive to the intention of Mac's words rather than the mere form. Laurence thus suggests, as she did with Hagar and Rachel, that positive change is possible within the larger pattern of Stacey's life. That change must be, however, within the context of who Stacey already is. Stacey's final means to self-knowledge is the acceptance of this fact and therefore of herself.

The first three novels of the Manawaka cycle therefore provide, within a Canadian context, an expansion of the themes explored in The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories and This Side Jordan: Laurence's observations on the interaction between past and present. For Hagar, Rachel, and Stacey the past manifests itself as a deadening force which stifles the individual's ability to open herself to others, as a force of isolation and failed communication. Yet Laurence shows that it is only through confronting the past that each woman gains

both an understanding of herself and some measure of inner freedom. Indeed, in all three novels Laurence suggests that freedom entails not escape from the past but the acceptance that total escape can never be achieved.

Chapter Three

As in the earlier African and Canadian works, the focus in A Bird in the House and The Diviners centres on the interaction between past and present, although in both the short stories and the novel Laurence's concern is primarily with the relationship between personal history and artistic perception. Moreover, the emphasis is not so much on the limitations which background imposes on present perception as on the nature of an artistic insight which allows both Vanessa MacLeod and Morag Gunn to come to terms with their pasts. If it may be granted that the stories in A Bird in the House are "authored" by Vanessa herself and that, as Leona Gom has suggested, the "Memorybank Movie" sequences in The Diviners are actually chapters in a novel Morag is writing, then the exploration of the past through her art becomes for each woman not only a means of self-analysis and therefore self-knowledge, but the source of artistic expression itself.[1]

While the stories in A Bird in the House were originally published separately, they were, as Laurence notes, "conceived from the beginning as a related group."[2] The relationship is established primarily through the use of the double narrative voice, which presents us with the experiences and observations of the young Vanessa as she moves from childhood into maturity, while at the same time revealing the perceptions that the mature Vanessa has of how these past experiences have

shaped her present self.[3] In particular, Vanessa as a mature artist explores the development of her own artistic sensibility, a development closely linked to her childhood initiation into life's mysteries. The shaping power of the past may be seen in terms of these rites of passage; the presence of the past is affirmed through the stories Vanessa writes out of her personal experiences.

In examining the development of her perception of art, Vanessa recalls her childhood preoccupation with the exotic and extraordinary in her fiction. For example, the child Vanessa expresses her imaginative concerns in the stories of "spectacular heroism" which she composes in her head to counteract the boredom of Sunday School lessons and in the often violent and bizarre stories which she sets down in five-cent scribblers. Essentially, she rejects any ties between the worlds of fiction and experienced reality, between the high drama of art and the ordinariness of life in Manawaka. Admittedly, she acknowledges Manawaka in her tale of the infant in christening robe swept away by the flooding Wachakwa River, but she transforms the ordinary--the muddy Wachakwa--into an agent of the grotesque. Beyond this particular concession, Manawaka seems hardly worthy of literary note, for whatever potential there is in terms of splendour or artistic significance is for Vanessa far removed from her small prairie town. Thus she can almost hate the marchers in the Remembrance Day parade because they look "like imposters, plump or spindly caricatures of past warriors" (BH 91). And thus she can abandon her epic The Pillars of the Nation when she learns that her own Grandfather Connor was a pioneer. She has, in fact, been bored by her Grandfather's stories

of his past; even his trek from Winnipeg to Manawaka is rendered unexceptional by the fact that he did not meet up "with any slit-eyed and treacherous Indians or any mad trappers, but only with ordinary farmers who had given him work shoeing their horses" (BH 10).

While Vanessa's stories are imaginative, it is important to note that she does not write from pure imagination, for she inherently senses the need for some form of experience as a well-spring for her artistic vision. However, she uses the authority of literature rather than direct, personal experience as an artistic touchstone. In this regard, she relies to a large extent on "experience" gained from her reading of the Bible, which she views as a source of poetic, not religious, authority. Even here, however, she transmutes her source material according to her own imaginative tastes. The woman in the love story Vanessa is writing thus closely resembles the "barbaric queen" of The Song of Solomon, except that Vanessa's heroine consoles herself with an avocado rather than apples in her beloved's absence; for an avocado, in Vanessa's view, is "considerably more stylish and exotic than apples in lieu of love" (BH 65).

It is also important to note that Vanessa's desire for the exotic within her fiction does not extend to an acceptance of unusual people in everyday occurrences. She is embarrassed by the "downright worthless" old men who loiter downtown, and she believes that they should be hidden away from view. She is also frightened by the seemingly mystical powers of the hired girl, Noreen, who dwells "in a world of violent splendours . . . filled with [both] angels . . . and crooked

cloven-hoofed monsters" (BH 100). Such fears suggest that Vanessa wishes to maintain the distinction between an imaginative vision which encompasses the exotic and her perception of the real world. Essentially, she sees literature and life as being on separate planes, and what is acceptable or even desirable in one is not to be countenanced in the other. Thus Vanessa may be willing to approach Piquette Tonnerre that summer at Diamond Lake because she sees this "junior prophetess of the wilds" as a source of esoteric detail for her wilderness tales (BH 119). However, confronted by Piquette in Manawaka's Regal Cafe, Vanessa sees her only as an embarrassment. She had thought Piquette dissociated from the "ordinary considerations" of life in Manawaka. Piquette is therefore a disconcerting presence when she attempts to penetrate Vanessa's safe and "real" world.

Vanessa's artistic perceptions are thus coloured by her desire for the unusual and by her belief that the "ordinary considerations" of life are divorced from the dramatic considerations of art. These perceptions change, however, as Vanessa gains in experience and thereby attains greater insight into the nature of life's "ordinary considerations." As a "professional listener" and observer of the human scene, Vanessa is more and more confronted by a world of pain, loneliness, and unfulfilled dreams, so that she is led to assert that "whatever God might love in this world, it was certainly not order" (BH 59). She witnesses her mother's and her aunt's resignation to life, her grandfather's grief over his wife's death, her father's sadness over the losses in his life. Vanessa initially fears and resents this evidence of disarray in her personal world and attempts to turn aside

from the knowledge. However, the experiences themselves provide Vanessa with the insight that the ordinary world she thought regrettably far removed from the great themes of literature contains as much of the dramatic as any tale of Egyptian lovers. Hearing Aunt Edna cry over Jimmy Lorimer, Vanessa confronts the depth of an ordinary woman's feelings for a man himself "unexceptional in every way" (BH 72); acknowledging the significance of her aunt's pain, Vanessa senses that her tale of the barbaric queen has lost its artistic authority, and she therefore plans to destroy it.

Vanessa's initiation into the sadder realities of life, into the suffering of which average people are capable, serves as her initiation into the awareness that the ordinary and the dramatic are not mutually exclusive, that the life she knows is not divorced from the themes of literature. This awareness culminates in the stories she writes out of her own personal history. Given that Vanessa is an artist, it is not unreasonable to infer that the stories in the collection are "written" by Vanessa herself, that she is writing about rather than merely remembering her past. She has absorbed her past experiences, and the experiences of people she has known, into her perceptual framework, all becoming part of the "accumulation of happenings" which Vanessa can not discard. The stories are her means of examining these experiences, of understanding herself as a person and as an artist. Moreover, the stories are an expression of her artistic insight, for they are her means of exploring the mysteries of ordinary life within an artistic framework. Finally, her art allows Vanessa to come to terms with past confusions and fears, for rather than turning

aside from pain or trying to avoid embarrassment as the child would have done, the mature Vanessa incorporates her fears within the artistic reconstruction of her past. Thus, even with the ordering vision of her art, Vanessa confronts and accepts the disorder that is an integral part of life.

In The Diviners Morag Gunn also comes to terms with past fears through her art. Indeed, a major fear has been her fear of the past itself; the artistic exploration of her life, contained in the "Memorybank Movie" sequences, is Morag's final means of confronting and accepting the past she has for much of her life hoped to escape. A consideration of Morag's journey toward self-knowledge is useful to an understanding of Laurence's belief in the necessity of coming to terms with the past.

Laurence provides a number of ironic perspectives on Morag's efforts to free herself from the past. On the one hand, Morag's desire for escape, symbolized by her desire to be forever free of Manawaka, is in large part a rejection of the petty snobbery of the more socially acceptable members of Manawaka society. Morag is essentially a victim of her community's past, of a legacy of respectability and concern with social position which will not acknowledge the ward of the town's scavenger as a legitimate heir. Rejected by the community, Morag in turn rejects Manawaka and, ostensibly, its values. When she finally leaves Manawaka, she does so with the intention of never returning to her home town.

On the other hand, Morag's rejection of her past life is also a rejection of her life with the scavenger Christie Logan; ironically, her desire to be free of Christie therefore suggests the extent of the community's influence over her. There is indeed earlier evidence that Morag had fallen victim to the Manawaka concern with respectability, a fact reflected not only in her disdain for Christie's work but also in her adolescent preoccupation with clothes as the mark of "Good Taste." When Mrs. Cameron bought the red dressmaker suit, Morag was upset not only because her own plans to purchase the outfit had been foiled but also because such a young style on a woman Mrs. Cameron's age was an affront to Morag's sense of decorum. Moreover, this sense of decorum remains with her after she has left home, as is evident in the tastefully tailored suits and smart cocktail dresses she wears to please her husband, Brooke Skelton. While she believes that her marriage to Brooke marks the beginning of a new life, Manawaka's influence still holds sway over her.

Laurence thus uses the relationship between Morag and Brooke to convey, on one level, the inescapability of the past, but she also uses it to suggest the dangers inherent in denying the past. Brooke is happy to accept Morag as the woman without a past she claims to be. She is for him a new person, whom he can mould to the role he has defined for her as his wife. However, Morag finds this role ultimately stifling and artificial and comes to feel increasingly separated from herself and dissatisfied in her relationship with Brooke. In effect, in denying the past, Morag has trapped herself in a meaningless and empty existence with a husband who knows nothing

of his wife beyond the present and the superficial. In particular, because Brooke sees Morag as little more than one dimensional, he can not take seriously the creativity she wishes to express through her writing and through her desire for a child.

Once again, Morag believes that she must free herself through escape, first into a brief affair with Jules Tonnerre and then, pregnant with Jules' child, in a move to Vancouver. She has not yet realized that her perception of freedom is illusory. This is not to say that Morag is wrong to leave Brooke but that she is naive to think that she can readily shed one life for another, that she can, as Hagar believed, begin again in a new place. It must be noted, however, that Morag does briefly express, in her affair with Jules, a need to affirm some connection with her earlier self, for she sees their sexual union not only as a means to self-integration, "a severing of inner chains which have kept her bound and separated from part of herself," but also as an acknowledgement of some debt owing to the past.[4] Her plans to begin a new life in Vancouver indicate, however, that she is not ready to make payment in full.

Vancouver does not, of course, provide a haven from the past. For example, the child Morag carries is a concrete link to Jules and therefore a symbolic tie to Morag's previous life. As well, Morag encounters her Manawaka past in the shape of Julie Kazlik, who tells Morag that Stacey Cameron and probably "thousands" of other Manawaka ex-patriates are living in Vancouver. As Julie notes:

We all head west, kiddo. We think it'll be

> heaven on earth. . . . So we troop out to the Coast, and every time we meet someone from back home we fall on their necks and weep. Stupid, eh? (D 302)

Neither Julie nor Morag agrees that such a response is "stupid." Indeed, Morag wonders whether the reverse of Thomas Wolfe's dictum that one can not go home again must be true, that one has "to go home again in some way or other" (D 302). Yet again, Morag is not ready to confront the past fully, although she does so in part through the novel she writes while living in Vancouver. As Ildiko de Papp Carrington has noted, the relationship between the wife and husband in Prospero's Child is analagous to the relationship between Morag and Brooke. The novel is thus an artistic recasting of one aspect of Morag's past.[5]

Ironically, Morag's decision to once again begin a new life, this time in London, sets the stage for her final acceptance of the need to confront the past. While in England, she is given the opportunity to visit the Sutherland district of Scotland, a destination toward which she has been moving, metaphorically, since her encounter with Christie's tales of Piper Gunn. Like the Sutherlanders of these stories and like the woman standing before the burning croft in Dan McRaith's painting, Morag has seen herself as one of "the Dispossessed." Her feelings of dispossession have in fact been largely self-inflicted, a result of her equation of freedom with escape. Ironically, while she has sought to escape the past on a personal level, she sees the visit as a means of coming to terms at least with her ancestral past, a fact which finally suggests a desire

to move toward rather than away from something. Having made this concession, she is faced with the final realization that she is moving in the wrong direction. She had once thought that Christie's tales connected her to her Scottish ancestors, but she now sees that their truth is as much, if not more, Canadian. That is, Morag now realizes that the truth inherent in the stories is that Canada, not Scotland, is the land of her ancestors and therefore her real home.

Having come to terms with the past on a cultural level, Morag is finally able to confront the past on a more personal level through her return to Manawaka. The physical return conveys, more importantly, her emotional acceptance of the past, an acceptance evident in her confession to the dying Christie that he has been a father to her. She has come home, and none of the "ghosts" she encounters in the house on Hill Street now seems threatening to her:

> Prin is here, and Piper Gunn and . . . another younger Morag, the felt or imagined presences of real and fictional people, the many versions of herself, combining and communing here, in her head, in this room with its time-stained wallpaper. (D 396)

Essentially, Morag has discovered that the past is not the fearful spectre she has dreaded; in any event, the past is something she can not deny. She knows that she will not stay in Manawaka, but she senses that the place and its people will remain with her inside her head. In particular, although she must give Christie his "true burial," with the piper playing the lament for the dead over Christie's grave, in another sense his spirit and the spirit of what

he has given Morag are a permanent part of her.

Ultimately, what the past offers Morag is artistic inspiration, for Christie and Manawaka become the central figures in the novel Morag is working on in the present action of The Diviners.[6] The "Memorybank Movie" sequences therefore underscore Laurence's perception both of the continuing presence of the past, for Morag's memories remain an integral and inescapable part of her, and of the necessity of making peace with the ghosts which continuously inhabit one's skull, for Morag acknowledges the past--personal and cultural--through her art. Moreover, The Diviners reveals a further dimension of Laurence's concern with the nature of artistic perception. While Vanessa expresses her artistic truth--that art must encompass the ordinary and probable--through an essentially straightforward exploration of the facts of her experience, Morag explores her artistic vision--that fiction contains a higher form of truth than that of mere documentable fact--through questioning her own ability to know the past. Her concern is evident in her reaction to Christie's tales of Piper Gunn and in her belief in the power of memory to "alter" the past.

Morag is at first fascinated by and fully accepting of Christie's stories of the legendary Piper Gunn, who leads the Sutherland crofters to a new life in a new world. She believes the tales but comes to doubt their veracity as she learns more of the historical accounts of the period and as she is confronted by the other version of "history" contained in Jules' stories, told to him by Lazarus, of

Rider Tonnerre and Old Jules.[7] Faced with such differing accounts, Morag faces the difficulty of knowing which is true, of saying what actually happened, but she does not finally side with one version over another. While she challenges Christie's perspectives on history, she senses that he is right in arguing that the history books themselves do not always deal in truth. She knows, as well, that Lazarus changes his stories with each retelling. Indeed, she questions the possibility of any story's being true in terms of historical accuracy, as is evident in her reaction to newspaper accounts of the role of Canadian soldiers during the Dieppe raid:

> Are any of the stories true? Probably it does not matter. They may console some. What is a true story? Is there any such thing? (D 144)

Morag accepts that if the newspaper accounts do "console," then the truth of their matter in terms of documentable fact itself does not "matter."

Given Morag's sensitivity to the difficulty of truly knowing the past, her final rejection of Christie's stories does not indicate a rejection of their mythic qualities. She rejects them not so much because she distrusts the tales as because she sees the teller himself as a fraud. She can not reconcile the image of the scrawny, unkempt Christie, smelling of the Nuisance Grounds, with his, and her, vision of the strong and stalwart Piper Gunn, or with Christie's proclaiming of his own ancestors' valour through his ranting of the Logans' family motto. The Christie Morag knows is a dealer in "muck"

and an embarrassment to her. As she denies the teller, so she repudiates the tales as "all a load of old manure" (D 160). It is only when Morag sees the truth of Christie's tales in terms of the understanding she gains of her heritage that she is finally able to make peace with the teller. Understanding the true value of the tales, she acknowledges the value of the man.

Morag's interest in the question of how one perceives the past remains of central concern to her. As a middle-aged woman, she is aware of her own propensity to alter the past, for she confesses her tendency to interpret her memories and embellish them to suit her present mood. She admits that her memory of her parents, for example, is that of "two barely moving shadows in my head . . . whose few remaining words and acts I have invented" (D 18-19). One such invented memory is that of her mother as an understanding, accepting woman, "not the sort of mother who yells at kids" (D 8); but Morag can not say with certainty whether the perception is solely imagined or centred in fact. She knows only that she remembers "composing this interpretation" as a child after her parents' deaths (D 8).

Essentially, Morag understands that the past contained within memory is protean, changing with each recollection:

> A popular misconception is that we can't change the past--everyone is constantly changing their own past, recalling it, revising it. What really happened? A meaningless question. But one which I keep trying to answer, knowing there is no answer. (D 60)

Inherent in Morag's statement is the question of what past reality is, for if the past is retained and contained within memory and memories can themselves be altered, be remembered or forgotten, how is one to say what "really happened" in any particular past instance? What fixity can reality--past or, by implication, present--therefore have? And given such an ironic perception of time, what truth about the past can Morag's novel contain? There can, indeed, be no guarantee that what has been revealed in the "Memorybank Movie" sequences is a completely factual account of Morag's life. However, the interweaving of history and fiction contains for Morag a higher form of truth than that of mere documentable fact. Morag's novel is an examination of the interrelated themes of self-knowledge, belonging, and coming to terms with the past which Morag has dealt with in her own life. The novel is a transmutation of experience into art; it is as art that the novel conveys the truth of that experience.

The Diviners itself, presumably, is for Laurence a means of conveying the realities of existence, and one of these realities is, ironically, that one's personal experience can not of necessity substitute for another's. Thus we see that while Pique's search for self-understanding, both in Morag's novel and in Laurence's, is analagous to Morag's own journey, the fact that Morag has reached her destination will not shorten Pique's effort; that is, Morag can offer no easy solution to Pique's quest. Pique feels, to use her own language, "split"; she wants to be "together" but does not know where she belongs. She has not yet, of course, read Morag's novel and so can gain no understanding of herself from her mother's art. But the

reader of Laurence's novel can infer the direction Pique's search must follow, for the suggestion is that Pique will find herself through an understanding of her own cultural past and place of belonging. Such understanding will encompass two heritages, for Pique is heir to both Jules' songs and Lazarus' knife, linking her to her Metis ancestry, and to Morag's tales of Christie and the plaid pin. The brooch on one level represents Morag's Scottish blood, but more importantly it is also an affirmation of Morag's sense of herself as a Canadian, for the brooch links her with the pioneers, the first non-aboriginal Canadians, who settled Canada. The two inheritances suggest that Pique will come to a conscious acceptance that her heritage as a Canadian is multi-faceted, that she is not divided but composite, that self-integration implies an understanding of the two cultural pasts within her.

In A Bird in the House and The Diviners, then, Laurence's concern with the interaction between past and present centres on the nature of the artist's role in terms of the incorporation of past experience within an artistic framework, the artist coming to terms with her past, and therefore herself, through her art. While we do not question that Vanessa has presented an honest and accurate, from her perspective, account of her life, Morag's own admittance of her propensity to alter the past through changing memories leads us to doubt that her account is equally exact. What therefore emerges in The Diviners is a compelling examination of the nature of truth in art based not on the mere fact of experience but on the essential understanding of human nature from which that experience has been distilled.

Conclusion

The "natural symbol" of the river which Laurence describes in "Where the World Began" and which recurs in The Diviners may stand as a metaphor for Laurence's conception of time in both her African and Canadian works. As the river appears to move in opposite directions at the same time, so time, Laurence argues, moves in two directions at once, "ahead into the past and back into the future" (D 453). This paradox serves to illustrate Laurence's perception of the interrelatedness of past, present, and future time, of the past as a force which shapes the individual and remains with him in the form of attitudes, values, and perceptions which are central to his very being. Such a conception of time encompasses the influences not only of direct personal experience but of the social and cultural milieu into which an individual is born. The cultural inheritance can admittedly be deadening, leading to conflicts between people of differing world views, people victimized by their misperceptions, incapable of seeing or understanding any viewpoint other than their own. Or the ancestors may serve to alienate even those within the tribe, acting, paradoxically, to affirm the connection between generations by isolating the individual from present society. In this regard, Laurence proves the past to be a source of misunderstanding, alienation, loneliness, and fear. But it is also Laurence's conviction that the past is inescapable, which is not to

say that Laurence is a pessimist but that she sees the necessity of finding some means of living, with humanity and dignity, within the context of the past. Nor does Laurence refute the possibility of change but rather points to the necessity of knowing where one has come from in order to know where to go. Ultimately, however, change can never be total, and for Laurence self-knowledge therefore implies an acceptance that one must carry most of one's mental "baggage" for life.

What is particularly significant about this conception of time as it emerges in the novels and short stories of the Manawaka cycle is that it provides Laurence with a means not only of understanding herself but of coming to terms with her art through exploring her cultural roots and her heritage. While the theme of knowing one's heritage is itself of universal concern, for the Canadian reader in particular Laurence's exploration of the Canadian experience offers a means to self-understanding. By giving voice to a significant element of the Canadian "cultural being," Laurence provides her reader with a clearer understanding of himself as a Canadian.

Notes

Introduction

[1] Margaret Laurence, "Where the World Began," Heart of a Stranger (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart-Bantam, 1976), p. 244. Further references are in the text as HS and page reference.

[2] Joan Hind-Smith, "Margaret Laurence," Three Voices (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1975), p. 25.

[3] Dick Harrison, Unnamed Country (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1977), p. 197.

[4] Margaret Laurence, "Time and the Narrative Voice," Margaret Laurence, ed. William New (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1977), p. 157.

[5] Margaret Laurence, The Fire-Dwellers, Introduction by Allan Bevan (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), p. 258. Further references are in the text as FD and page reference.

[6] Donald Cameron, "Margaret Laurence: The Black Celt Speaks of Freedom," Conversations with Canadian Novelists, ed. Donald Cameron (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1973), p. 103.

[7] Cameron, p. 114.

[8] Laurence, "Time and the Narrative Voice," p. 156.

[9] Graeme Gibson, "Margaret Laurence," Eleven Canadian Novelists Interviewed by Graeme Gibson (Toronto: Anansi, 1973), p. 203.

[10] Margaret Laurence, "Jericho's Brick Battlements," A Bird in the House, Introduction by Robert Gibbs (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 202. Further references to stories in the collection are in the text as BH and page reference.

Chapter One

[1] Gibson, Eleven Canadian Novelists, p. 205.

[2] Clara Thomas, transcriber, "A Conversation About Literature: An Interview with Margaret Laurence and Irving Layton," Journal of Canadian Fiction 1:1 (Winter 1972), p. 66.

[3] Margaret Laurence, "The Tomorrow-Tamer," The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963), p. 78. Further references to stories in the collection are in the text as TT and page reference.

[4] Laurence again uses this image of the tree as symbolic of a community continuous in time in "A Gourdful of Glory" in the description of Mammii Ama standing like " a royal palm . . . spreading her arms like fronds, to shelter the generations" (TT 243).

[5] Ironically, the people of Owurasu see in Kofi's death a reaffirmation of the truth of the old ways, and they reconnect Kofi to the traditional beliefs of the village through the myths which they weave around his name. It is further important to note that the villagers are able to absorb the new god into their system of values, to assimilate the present into the past, because the bridge is now rooted in their soil, neither physically nor symbolically connected to any life beyond the life of the village. Their security can not be permanent, however, for the new road being built to join

the bridge will soon connect the village to the outside.

[6] It is ironic that the missionary's attempts to eradicate the old ways are rendered ineffectual by the Africans' tendency to recast his message in terms of their own perceptions and modes of belief, as is evident in the fact that the pulse of the forest, albeit updated to a syncopated jazz beat, provides the underlying rhythm for the band's version of "Onward Christian Soldiers" played in the mission parades. Laurence offers this same sense of the ironic in "Godman's Master" in the description of the fetish grove at Elmina, the site of a Portuguese mission built centuries before in honour of Saint Anthony. Saint Anthony has become Nana Ntona, and the crucifix and baptismal bowl once used in the mission services are now used in the worship of this pagan god.

[7] Kwabena's criticism of the ju-ju as a source of faith but not fulfillment is supported by Laurence's depiction of Love in "A Fetish for Love." The young African woman believes unwaveringly in the power of the ju-ju to give her a child, a belief which blinds her to the fact that because of her husband's infertility she must remain childless. Her hope, as Laurence notes, is ultimately "hopeless." That Kwabena's criticism is justified does not indicate, however, that he is right to reject the past out of hand, for his refusal to acknowledge anything of value in the past leaves him bitter and alienated.

[8] Margaret Laurence, <u>This Side Jordan</u>, Introduction by William New (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960), p. 126. Further references are in the text as TSJ and page reference.

[9] Clare Alexander Darby, "The Novels and Short Stories of Margaret Laurence," M.A. Thesis New Brunswick 1971, p. 35.

[10] William New, Introduction, This Side Jordan, p. xiii. As New states, "[A]t critical times the mixing of the two ideologies is complete."

Chapter Two

[1] Margaret Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences," Margaret Laurence, ed. William New, p. 22.

[2] Robert Kroetsch, "A Conversation with Margaret Laurence," Creation, ed. Robert Kroetsch (Toronto: New Press, 1970), pp. 54-55.

Margaret Laurence, "A Place to Stand On," Heart of a Stranger, p. 17.

[3] Bernice Lever, "Literature and Canadian Culture: An Interview with Margaret Laurence," Margaret Laurence, ed. New, p. 27.

[4] Margaret Laurence, The Stone Angel, Introduction by William New (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1968), p. 15. Further references are in the text as SA and page reference.

[5] Lottie is now Lottie Simmons, of course, but as Hagar notes, "Who's Telford Simmons, for heaven's sake? . . . The Simmonses were nothing to write home about" (SA 204).

[6] Graeme Gibson, Eleven Canadian Novelists, p. 204.

[7] Margaret Laurence, A Jest of God, Introduction by G.D. Killam (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 19. Further references are in the text as JG and page reference.

[8] The juxtaposition of past and present which serves as the structural basis for The Stone Angel further underscores Laurence's conception of the continuing presence of the past.

[9] Clara Thomas, The Manawaka World of Margaret Laurence (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), p. 69.

[10] Patricia Morley, Margaret Laurence (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), p. 81.

[11] Laurence, "Ten Years' Sentences," p. 21.

[12] Stacey's perception of her marriage as a prison is best conveyed in the opening pages of the novel. The idea of entrapment is suggested by the mirror, which contains the images of objects which represent Stacey's relationship with her family. Both the mirror and the objects are bound by the "four walls" of Stacey's home. That the mirror images are "isolated and limited by a frame" heightens Stacey's confinement by conveying her isolation from the world beyond Bluejay Crescent. Stacey confesses that she knows nothing of the city where she has lived for nearly twenty years.

Chapter Three

[1] Leona Gom, "Laurence and the Use of Memory," Can Lit, No. 71 (1976), p. 52.

[2] Laurence, "Time and the Narrative Voice," p. 158.

[3] Patricia Morley, "The Long Trek Home: Margaret Laurence's Stories," Journal of Canadian Studies, 11 (Nov. 1976), p. 20.

[4] Margaret Laurence, The Diviners, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p. 271. Further references are in the text as D and page reference.

[5] Ildiko de Papp Carrington, "'Tales in the Telling': The Diviners as Fiction about Fiction," Essays on Canadian Writing, No. 9 (Winter 1977-78), p. 156.

[6] The fact that the sections of The Diviners dealing with Morag's past are written in the present tense, while the present action--centring on Morag's writing of her novel--is in the past tense, suggests the fluid nature of time. The structure of The Diviners, as does the structure of The Stone Angel, therefore reinforces Laurence's emphasis on the relationship between past and present.

[7] Christie's tale of "Piper Gunn and the Rebels" presents the Metis uprisings in a light decidedly different from Jules' stories of "Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet" and "Old Jules and the War Out West," although ironically both sets of stories deal with the same themes of community and survival in their depiction of the Sutherlanders' defence of their homes against the rebellious Metis and the Metis' defence of their land against the incursion of white settlers.

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